

Lazarus and the Rich Man

The Meaning Behind the Savior's Parable

Of all that the Bible says about the state of the dead, perhaps nothing is cited more than the Savior's parable about Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16. The popular interpretation of the parable is that upon death, we go immediately to heaven or to ever-burning hellfire ... a belief prompted by the Savior's naming of a Lazarus as a principal in the parable.

Often, however, the Savior's teachings were administered in allegories and parables and had a deep spiritual meaning and, therefore, one must be careful assigning a literal approach to the content of Luke 16.

The truth of what the Savior really said is missed by many. To suppose Yahshua the Messiah was supporting the notion of one going to hell at death is to contradict a host of other Scriptures, which should make the content of the Bible subject to scrutiny and skepticism.

A Message to Certain Jews

Central to the parable is Yahshua's teaching about an unjust steward: *No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve Elohim and mammon*, Luke 16:13.

The Pharisees who were covetous (verse 14) and thought Him contemptible, subsequently derided Him. Yahshua then leveled His remarks directly at them, continuing with verses 15-18, the latter verse a reference to adultery: *Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery*, Luke 16:18.

Yahshua was speaking here metaphorically. The Prophets of the Old Testament presented Israel as married to Him, but they and their descendants (notably the Pharisees, with their traditions which they taught for the Commandments of Yahweh (Matt. 15:3, 6), had not been faithful and these, contemporary with Yahshua, had also rejected Him as the Messiah. These then, Yahshua charged with having committed spiritual adultery.

The consequence of Israel's infidelity was the dispersion of the ten northern tribes throughout the world, and the later displacement of the southern house of Judah, too. Nevertheless, owing to Israel's (Jacob) prophecy concerning Judah (Gen. 49:8-12), this tribe was favored as the royal line from which kings (including Yahshua) would come. Pharisees lived comfortably and thought of themselves, and their prosperity, was a sign of Yahweh's favor. Because of their dispositions, however, their prosperity was turned into a curse.

And so, we find Yahshua's narrative, beginning with verse 19, a striking and pointed disapprobation of them and their attitude. *There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores. And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores*, Luke 16:19-21.

Here is a man (like unto the Pharisee) accustomed to the best in life. His "purple and fine linen" signify he is of a royal, ruling class. The contrast between the rich man and Lazarus is striking. While the former lives sumptuously, the other exists in abject poverty, is ill, and is satisfied with the most meager of sustenance.

Lazarus, the Adopted Servant

The name Lazarus is a Talmudic-Grecianized form of Eliezer, meaning "El has helped."

Genesis 15:2-3 serves to identify him: *And Abram said, "Yahweh Elohim, what wilt Thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house [is] this Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "Behold, to me Thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir."*

Eliezer, though not of Abram's seed, is yet a trusted servant but is not chosen of Yahweh through whom the Promise and the Covenant will come. Indeed, in Genesis 24, Eliezer is found, at Abraham's direction, in Mesopotamia, unto the city of Nahor, to seek a woman for Abraham's son and heir, Isaac.

This Eliezer of the Genesis narrative and Lazarus of the Luke 16 account are Gentiles, also disesteemed by Jewry as "dogs." In Matthew 15:22-28, a woman of Canaan besought the Master to exorcise her daughter of an unclean spirit, protesting that even "dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table (Matt. 15:27) and parallels this Gentile Lazarus in Luke 16:21, who desired to be fed with crumbs which fell from the rich man's table and whose sores, the dogs licked.

Abraham's Bosom? Not in Heaven

*And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried, Luke 16:22. Many preachers tell us this means the beggar was carried off to heaven, though "Abraham's bosom" is a Hebrew idiom that means "one sits in a favored position" (*Lightfoot's Commentary*).*

But if, indeed, Abraham is in heaven, his "obituary" in Genesis 25:7-9 should have corroborated "this fact," but it fails to do so. *And these are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived, an hundred threescore and fifteen years. Then Abraham gave up the spirit, and died in a good old age, and full of [years]; and was gathered to his people. And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre.*

If Lazarus is in "Abraham's bosom," then he, too, is buried with him in the cave of Machpelah in the field of Ephron and could not, therefore, now be in heaven! The Genesis accounting of Abraham's death and burial agrees with Yahweh's foretelling him in Genesis 15:15, *And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age.* In death, Abraham joined his forefathers who were idol worshipers—would they be rewarded in heaven? (Jos. 24:2)—preceding him in their own demise, and are in the grave awaiting resurrection. If Abraham's fathers were in an ever-burning hell—no "idolater, hath any inheritance in the Kingdom of Messiah and of Yahweh" (Eph. 5:5)—then Abraham is with them, and so is Lazarus.

The Resurrection of Life; the Resurrection of Damnation (John 5:29)

"Gathered to his people" (Gen. 25:8) is a Hebrew idiom, simply meaning he "died and joined the dead." It neither means one has died and gone to heaven; nor does it mean one has died and gone to hell. It means simply, one has died, is buried, and awaiting resurrection from the grave.

In John 3:13, Yahshua plainly says, *And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, [even] the Son of man which is in heaven.* All the dead, past and future, are waiting resurrection, as it is written: *Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation, John 5:28-29.*

Toasting? Roasting?

And in hell (the grave) he (the rich man) lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom, Luke 16:24.

According to Yahshua's prophecy in Luke 13:38, *There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the Kingdom of Yahweh, and you [yourselves] thrust out.* The suffering of the rich man is understood in the context of being excluded, "thrust out" from the Kingdom, and not committed to an ever-burning hell. Request your free in-depth booklet called, *Understanding Hellfire*.

On the other hand, Lazarus (in "Abraham's bosom," in a favored position) has been a participant in the First Resurrection (Rev. 20:6), as it were, having been among the elect gathered at the great sound of a trumpet heralding Yahshua's return in the clouds with power and great glory (Matt. 24:30-31; 1 Thess. 4:15-17).

"Being in torments" comes from *Strong's G.931, basanos*, and has the meaning of *test, inquisition, trial* and is, perhaps, best expressed in the context of 1 Corinthians 3:13: *Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.*

Figuratively, "being in torments" means "mental torment"—a realization one has not attained the Resurrection of the Just with Its promise of the Kingdom. The rich man in Verse 24, is appealing to Abraham for mercy, to send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool his tongue; for he was tormented in this flame. If "this flame" were the fires of Gehenna, he would not have been sated with a dip of the tip of Lazarus's finger in water. Again, "being in torments" is the mental anguish he has with the knowledge that he has been precluded from the Kingdom of Yahweh!

A Great Gulf Fixed

But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise, Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou are tormented (grieved, sorrow – G.3600 odunao). And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that [would come] from thence, Luke 16:25-26.

"A great gulf fixed" is a type of the Jordan River Valley. Those of Israel which crossed It, were in the Promised Land. So also, they which have inherited the Kingdom of Yahweh.

Parallels with the Sons of Leah

Then he (the rich man) said, "I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him (Lazarus) to my father's house: for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment," Luke 16:27-28.

As noted earlier, the "rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day" (Verse 19) represents Judah, favored as the royal line from which kings would come. Judah had five brothers: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, and Zebulun (Gen. 35:23): represented by the rich man's "five brethren." As such, the "five brethren" of the rich man parallel the five brethren of Judah—all proceeded from the same father; all neglected proper attentions to Yahweh; all fell into the same judgment.

But notice Abraham's response to the rich man: *They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them, Luke 16:29.* Abraham's reply in effect, tells the rich man, and us, that the Old Testament TORAH (Law) and the Prophets are sufficient to bring men to repentance to which

the rich man objects, saying, *Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent*, Luke 16:30.

Abraham retorts in Verse 31, *If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead*, so steeped, blinded, and wrapped up in their “purple and fine linen,” as in *How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of Yahweh*, Mark 10:25.

What the Parable Says to Us

Too late, the rich man realizes he had not done what he knew was right to have done. Many today, are like to him ... perhaps, having “the form of piety, but denying the power thereof” (2 Tim. 3:5); perhaps even, *ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*, 2 Timothy 3:7. Lazarus, on the other hand, represents Gentiles who snatch up the “crumb of truth” and live by It. Yahweh never purposed that affluence should preclude living, and moving, and having one’s being in Him (Acts 17:28).

The parable of Lazarus and the rich man shows we cannot be smug and rejoice in those things which are certain to perish with the using. We are to be living examples of Yahweh’s Word, reaching out to share the glorious Good News of the Kingdom and the inheritance awaiting them who have escaped the pull of “purple and fine linen.”

Perhaps the parable might better be termed, “The Parable of the Six Brothers”—six, the number of man with his fleshly, carnal nature. And perhaps the takeaway might best be expressed by these words of Yahshua: *Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for Him hath Yahweh the Father sealed*, John 6:27.

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